

## VII. THE CHINESE ORIGIN OF A ROMANTICISM \*

### 1

THE SANCTITY of the notion of "regularity" in the typically neo-classical aesthetic doctrines is well known; but three examples of it are worth recalling, to serve as background for the principal theme of this essay. The first is Sir Christopher Wren's definition of beauty:

Beauty is a Harmony of Objects, begetting Pleasure by the Eye. There are two Causes of Beauty—natural and customary. Natural is from Geometry, consisting in Uniformity (that is Equality). . . . Always the true test is natural or geometrical Beauty. Geometrical Figures are naturally more beautiful than any other irregular; in this all consent, as to a Law of Nature.<sup>1</sup>

In the same vein John Dennis wrote of poetry in 1704:

If the end of poetry is to instruct and reform the world, that is, to bring mankind from irregularity and confusion to rule and order, how this should be done by a thing that is in itself irregular and extravagant, is difficult to be conceiv'd. . . . The work of every reasonable creature must derive its beauty from regularity, for Reason is rule and order, and nothing can be irregular . . . any further than it swerves from rules, that is from Reason. . . . The works of man must needs be the more perfect, the more they resemble his Maker's. Now the works of God, though infinitely various, are extremely regular. The Universe is regular in all its parts, and it is to that exact regularity that it owes its admirable beauty.<sup>2</sup>

It was, however, rather difficult to make this last proposition appear plausible when one actually observed the visible appear-

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<sup>1</sup> *Parentalia*, cited in L. Weaver, *Sir Christopher Wren* (1923), 150.

<sup>2</sup> "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry," in Durham, *Critical Essays, 1700-1725*.

ances of nature. It is therefore interesting to note the delight with which the disclosure of previously unknown examples of regularity in nature's architecture was sometimes hailed. As late as 1772 Sir Joseph Banks, on his expedition to Iceland, discovered the grotto now known as Fingal's Cave on the Island of Staffa, in which basaltic pillars, "almost in the shape of those used in architecture, rise in natural colonnades on either side with remarkable regularity." What seems most to have pleased the discoverer was that Nature was thus aesthetically vindicated and shown to furnish the model for classical architecture. For after describing the scene he bursts into this rhapsody:

Compared to this, what are the cathedrals or palaces built by men! mere models or playthings, diminutive as his works will always be when compared to those of Nature. Where is now the boast of the architect! Regularity, the only part in which he fancied himself to excel his mistress, Nature, is there found in her possession, and here it has been for ages undescribed. Is not this the school where the art was originally studied, and what had been added to this by the whole *Grecian* school? A capital to ornament the column of Nature, of which they could execute only a model; and for that very capital they were obliged to a bush of Acanthus: how amply does Nature repay those who study her wonderful works! \*

It is no longer needful to dwell upon the many-sided importance of that change in aesthetic standards which took place, chiefly in the course of the eighteenth century, when regularity, uniformity, clearly recognizable balance and parallelism came to be regarded as capital defects in a work of art, and irregularity, asymmetry, variety, surprise, an avoidance of that simplicity and unity which render a whole design comprehensible at a glance, took rank as aesthetic virtues of a high order. It is also, by this time, pretty generally known that the change

\* "Account of Staffa, communicated by Joseph Banks, Esq." in Thomas Pennant's *A Tour of Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides*, 1774. That actual observation of nature would not lead one to suppose that God "always geometrizes" had been admitted by the botanist John Ray in his *Three Physico-Theological Discourses* (3d ed., 1713, pp. 34-5). But, desiring to justify God's ways to man, he maintained that "the present Face of the Earth, with all its Mountains and Hills, as rude and deformed as they appear," is a more "beautiful and pleasant Object" than it would be without these "Inequalities."

first appeared on a considerable scale in other arts and only gradually spread to the aesthetics of literature. In these other arts this incipient Romanticism manifested itself in, and was promoted by, four new phenomena in eighteenth-century taste and artistic practice: (a) the enthusiasm for the landscape-painting of Claude Lorrain, Poussin and Salvator Rosa; (b) the introduction and wide diffusion of the English or so-called "natural" style in gardening, which was perhaps the eighteenth-century art *par excellence*; (c) the Gothic revival which began in England with the not very happy efforts of Batty Langley and Sanderson Miller in the 1740s; (d) the admiration for the Chinese garden and, in a less degree, for the architecture and other artistic achievements of the Chinese. These, and especially the last three, were very intimately associated in the eighteenth-century mind; the second and fourth, indeed, were so completely fused that, as is well known, they came to bear a single name, *le goût anglo-chinois*. They were associated because they all exemplified, or were supposed by *virtuosi* and critics of the first half of the century to express, the same set of fundamental aesthetic principles. They were differing applications of the gospel of irregularity, diverse modes of returning to the imitation of nature conceived, not as geometrical, orderly and uniform, but as distinguished by freedom from formal patterns, "wildness," and inexhaustible diversity.

Of these four related movements, three have been dealt with and their significance in the history of general aesthetic ideas pointed out in recent and excellent studies—the first in Miss Manwaring's *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England*, the second in Mr. Christopher Hussey's book on *The Picturesque*, and to some extent in Mr. Draper's life of William Mason. The story of the third, the Gothic revival, has been told interestingly but not altogether adequately in Sir Kenneth Clark's work on this topic. The fourth, though its external history, chiefly in separate countries, has more than once been written, has not, so far as I know, been comprehensively treated from the standpoint of the student of the history of ideas—certainly not in its English manifestations. Mr. Hussey has devoted three or four lively and sometimes illuminating pages to it, but he has not traced the fashion to its real source, nor

distinguished the phases of its history, nor done full justice to its historical significance.

I shall in this essay show that the Chinese style in gardening began to exercise its influence upon aesthetic ideas and fashions earlier than the new models in gardening given by Switzer, Kent, Brown, and Bridgman, earlier even than the literary expression of the new ideal of gardening by Pope and Addison in the first decade of the century; that the general idea of a "beauty without order" was apparently first definitely presented by an important English writer as a Chinese idea, actually realized in Chinese gardens; that the taste for the *jardin anglais* owed much to the earlier idealization of the Chinese garden; that through the first seven or eight decades of the century the admiration for these gardens—or for what they were supposed to be—continued to exercise an influence which was probably little, if at all, less potent than that of the other three new aesthetic fashions mentioned, in promoting the variety of Romanticism to which I have referred; that for a time Gothicism and the *goût chinois* were especially closely related; and that in the seventeen-seventies a new conception of the aesthetic aims and principles of Chinese gardening (and other arts) and of its relation to the English style was introduced, which was apparently fatal to the enthusiasm for Chinese gardens in England.

## 2

The general fact which lies behind the particular episode with which I shall deal is, of course, the enormous reputation which Chinese civilization had in Europe from the late sixteenth until the late eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In the very earliest reports by voyagers and missionaries who had visited China, even before the establishment of the Jesuit mission in Peking, the writers dilate with surprise and admiration upon the excel-

<sup>4</sup> On this see Reichwein, *China und Europa*, 1923 (Engl. tr., 1925); G. Atkinson, *Les relations de voyages du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle* (n. d.), chap. V; and the following, which have appeared since this essay was written: V. Pinot, *La Chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France, 1640-1740* (1932); A. H. Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin* (1942), chaps. XVI-XVII; Lewis S. Maverick, *China a model for Europe* (1946). Pinot's and Maverick's volumes contain extensive bibliographies.

lence of the Chinese system of government and of their administration of justice, which, it is usually remarked, Europeans might imitate with advantage; by 1590 the assumption of the superiority of the Chinese political system was apparently already a commonplace.<sup>5</sup> The earliest substantial treatise on China, by Father Gonzalez de Mendoza, which was speedily translated into the principal European languages,<sup>6</sup> evoked the first enthusiastic eulogy of the Chinese by a great European writer: Montaigne, who had never mentioned China in the editions of the *Essais* published during his lifetime, read this book sometime between 1588 and his death in 1592, and prepared a new paragraph which was inserted in the posthumous edition (1595):

... la Chine, duquel royaume la police et les arts, sans commerce et cognoissance des nostres, surpassent nos exemples en plusieurs parties d'excellence, et duquel l'histoire m'apprend combien le monde est plus ample et plus divers que ny les anciens ny nous ne penetrons.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Chinese already figured in European eyes as, above all, masters in the great practical art of government. And as such they continued to figure for nearly two hundred years. When, after 1615, the long succession of Jesuit reports and descriptions of China began to flow into Europe,<sup>8</sup> its reputation in

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *An excellent treatise of the kingdome of China, and of the estate and government thereof written in Latin . . .* (Macao, 1590); English tr. in Hakluyt's *Voyages* (1589-1598): "their manner of government, wherein the Chinians are said greatly to excell" (1904 ed., VI, 363).

<sup>6</sup> *Historia de las cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres del Reyno de la China*, Lisbon, 1584; Spanish tr., 1585; Italian, 1586; French, 1588; English, 1588.

<sup>7</sup> *Essais*, III, 13: "De l'expérience." Montaigne proceeds to dwell upon the feature of Chinese "justice" which he especially admired: it rewards officials who perform their functions well, and does not merely punish those who perform them ill. This, he had already insisted in the original version of the essay, is requisite for real justice; he now discovered, with gratified surprise, that—in contrast with *notre justice à nous*—the Chinese actually embodied his own conception in their institutions and laws.

<sup>8</sup> The first of these was the general descriptive account by Father Nicolas Trigault prefixed to his story of the early years of the mission, based upon the diary of its founder, Father Matteo Ricci: *De christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta . . .* Libri V, 1615. Trigault's account (Bk. I) was partially translated in *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625), Bk. III. A not always accurate translation of it by Father L. J. Gallagher, S. J. has been published (1942).

this respect was only confirmed, as various more specific grounds for it were set forth. A stereotyped list of points in which the Chinese political institutions and practice were superior to those of the West was repeated again and again. In that country even the highest state offices (below the Emperor) were "open for all men, without any respect of degree or parentage."<sup>9</sup> Admission to the public service required definite and exacting educational qualifications, tested by examinations, and evidence of personal character and competence: "the holding of any political office depends upon proved knowledge, virtue, prudence and ability."<sup>10</sup> There was a seeming constant insistence, through periodic visitations of inspectors, upon efficiency and a regard for the public interest in the operation of the entire political mechanism. China was the realization of Plato's dream—a state ruled by "philosophers"; the great Jesuit polymath, Athanasius Kircher, in his *China illustrata* (1670)—a sort of encyclopedia of information about the Middle Kingdom—though, naturally, disapproving of the popular religions of the Chinese and of much in their private behavior, wrote:

. . . cet État est gouverné par les Doctes, à la mode des Platoniciens, et selon le désir du Philosophe divin: en quoy j'estime ce Royaume heureux, lequel a un Roy qui peut philosopher ou qui souffre du moins qu'un philosophe le gouverne et le conduit.<sup>11</sup>

Exemplary also were the Chinese in their conduct towards neighboring countries: "neither the king nor his subjects ever think of conquering other nations. They are content with what is theirs and do not covet what belongs to others."<sup>12</sup> They were, in fact, the least militaristic of all peoples: "no

under the title: *The China that was: China as discovered by the Jesuits of the sixteenth century.*

<sup>9</sup> *An excellent treatise*, etc., in Hakluyt, *op. cit.*, VI, 363.

<sup>10</sup> Trigault, *op. cit.*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, French tr., 226. In general, Kircher observes, "de toutes les Monarchies qu'il y ait dans l'Univers, il n'y a pas une de si célèbre ny de si recommandable" (*ibid.*, 223).

<sup>12</sup> Trigault, *op. cit.*, 64. "In this respect," Trigault adds, "they appear to me to differ most widely from the peoples of Europe, . . . who seem eaten up with an insatiable lust of domination."

mortals have ever had an abhorrence of everything military equal to that of the Chinese."<sup>13</sup>

Admittedly preëminent in the science and art of politics, the Chinese soon acquired an almost equally great reputation as moralists. Trigault had remarked that they have a peculiar preoccupation with the *science des mœurs*, "to a knowledge of which they have attained"—though he did not think highly of their achievements in the natural sciences. But it was especially to the growing fame of Confucius in the seventeenth century that the recognition of their merit in moral philosophy was due; and for this the Jesuit writers were almost wholly responsible, at first through brief summaries of his teachings, after 1687 through a small volume containing Latin translations from his (actual or reputed) writings, *Confucius Sinarum philosophus*, by a group of Jesuit Fathers. The Introduction to this reached the high-water mark of Western eulogy of the Chinese sage; it boldly declared that Confucius's is "the excellentest Morality that ever was taught, a Morality which might be said to proceed from the School of Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the century, then, it had come to be widely accepted that the Chinese—by the light of nature alone—had surpassed Christian Europe both in the art of government and in ethics. To illustrate this, it will here suffice to quote the observations concerning them of the greatest mind among their admirers. Leibniz in his *Novissima Sinica* (1699) makes a detailed comparison of the achievements of the Chinese with those of Europeans. The latter, he concludes, excel in logic and metaphysics, the knowledge of "incorporeal things," in astronomy and geometry, and in military science.

In these, then, we are superior. But who would formerly have believed that . . . there is a people which surpasses us in its principles of civil life? And this, nevertheless, we now experience in the case of the Chinese, as they become better known to us. And so, if in the mechanical arts we are their equals, if in the contemplative sciences we beat them, certainly in practical philosophy—be it said almost with shame—we are beaten by them—that is, in the principles of Ethics and Politics. For it is impossible to describe how

<sup>13</sup> Isaac Voss (Vossius) in *Variarum observationum liber* (1685), 66.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from the English translation, 2nd ed., 1724.

beautifully everything in the laws of the Chinese, more than in those of other peoples, is directed to the achievement of public tranquillity, to that good order in the relations of men to one another whereby each is in the least degree injurious to others. Certain it is that the greatest evils which men suffer come from themselves, and are inflicted by them upon one another, so that the saying *homo homini lupus*, every man is a wolf to his neighbor, was all too truly spoken. Great indeed is our folly (but it is universal folly) with which we, exposed as we are to so many natural ills, heap upon ourselves miseries from which we should otherwise be free. If reason anywhere provides a remedy for this evil, certainly the Chinese more than others attain to a better standard (*norma*), and, in a vast society of men, they achieve it in almost a higher degree than do, among us, the founders of religious societies in their small establishments (*familiae*).<sup>15</sup>

Both China and Europe, Leibniz held, have something to learn from one another, and he was zealous in promoting the project of a joint Chinese-European Academy of Science, in which the scientific knowledge of the West, especially the "mathematical arts," and also "our doctrine of Philosophy," should be investigated and taught:

If this should be carried out, I fear lest we soon be inferior to the Chinese in everything that is deserving of praise. I say this, not because I envy them any new light—on that I should rather congratulate them—but because it is to be desired that we, on our side, should learn from them those things which hitherto have, rather, been lacking<sup>16</sup> in our affairs, especially the use of practical philosophy and an improved understanding of how to live (*amendatio vivendi ratio*)—to say nothing at present of other arts. Certainly the state of our affairs, as corruptions spread among us without measure, seems to me such that it would appear almost necessary that Chinese missionaries should be sent to us to teach us the use and practice of natural religion (*theologia naturalis*), just as we send missionaries to them to teach them revealed religion. And so, I believe that if a wise man were chosen to pass judgment, not upon the shapes of goddesses, but upon the excellence of peoples, he would award the golden apple to the Chinese—except that we should have the better of them in one supreme, but super-human, thing, namely, the divine gift of the Christian religion.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, preface.

<sup>16</sup> I take *essent* in the Latin text to be a misprint for *deessent*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

All this, however, was bound to produce a reaction among the watch-dogs of religious, especially of Catholic, orthodoxy. To admit that the heathen Chinese, guided only by the light of nature, had been able to attain the best ethics and the best government in the world, was to cast doubt upon the indispensability of the Christian teaching and of the guidance of human affairs by the Church. The theologians had never denied the needfulness of the use of the natural reason; but to say that, even for this life, it was sufficient, and that those who relied upon it alone were better moralists than Christians, whose minds were illumined by supernatural grace, was too much. The Jesuit mission, as is now notorious, had had a paradoxical outcome. It had not converted many Chinese, but it had done much to strengthen the position of sceptics and deists in Europe. As Rowbotham remarks, in his admirable and sympathetic history of the mission, "the outstanding ironic fact of early Jesuit history is that, perhaps more than any other organization, the members of the Society put into the hands of the anti-Christian forces one of their most effective weapons against the Church."<sup>18</sup> The danger had been noted by some of the Jesuits themselves in the seventeenth century; about the beginning of the eighteenth century the ecclesiastical reaction against Sinomania became marked. The legend of Chinese superiority must be destroyed. In the first decade of the century Fénelon led the attack. He devoted the longest of the *Dialogues des Morts* to an argument between Confucius and Socrates in which the latter belittles "la prééminence tant vantée des Chinois." The belief in the virtues of the Chinese, Socrates is made to argue, arises from an idealization born of ignorance; Europeans know too little of Chinese history, literature and life, to justify the customary eulogies. Nor does Fénelon content himself with mere scepticism upon the point; on the evidence available he, through the mouth of the Greek sage, pronounces the Chinese to be "the vainest, the most superstitious, the most selfish (*intéressé*), the most unjust, and the most mendacious people on earth."<sup>19</sup>

But this effort to check Sinomania was unavailing. The

<sup>18</sup> *Missionary and Mandarin* (1942), 294. —

<sup>19</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1823 ed., XIX, 146-161.

most sensational incident in the history of the German universities in the first half of the century contributed to its growth. The philosopher Christian Wolff in an academic oration at the University of Halle in 1721, *De Sinarum philosophia practica*, declared that "the ancient Emperors and Kings of China were men of a philosophical Turn," and that "to their Care it is owing, that their Form of Government is of all others the best, and that as in Antiquity, so in the Art of Governing, this Nation has ever surpassed all others without exception."<sup>20</sup> The result may best be told in the words of Wolff's contemporary English translator:

This Speech so alarmed the Divines of the University at Halle, that without regard to Truth or common Justice, they fastened on him the blackest of imputations and the most impious Notions possible; tho' he asserted nothing other in it but that the Chinese Manner of Philosophy had a great affinity with his own. Francke and Lange, both Doctors in Divinity, and the greatest Enemies Mr. Wolffius ever had, exclaimed against him on this Occasion in their publick Sermons. And the *Odium Theologicum* went so far as to brand him with the appellation of Heathen and Atheist: Nor was their Rancour thus satisfied, but they represented him to the late King of Prussia as a Man of the most dangerous and pernicious, and so far their black Calumny prevailed, that the King ordered him under Pain of immediate Death to quit the University of Halle in twenty-four hours and his Dominions in forty-eight.<sup>21</sup>

The Chinese cult thus had a martyr—and the martyrdom was highly advantageous to it as well as to the victim, who was promptly called to Marburg, where he was rapturously received by the students as a hero of the cause of enlightenment.<sup>22</sup> Wolff's political and moral gospel according to the Chinese appeared in English as a dissertation: *The Real Happiness of a People under a Philosophical King Demonstrated; Not only from the Nature of Things, but from the undoubted Experience of the Chinese, under their first Founder Fo Hi, and his illustrious successors, Hoam Ti and Xin Num.*

The chorus of praise of Chinese government and ethics was

<sup>20</sup> From Wolff's own summary in the English translation of his book (1750).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.

<sup>22</sup> There is in the *aula* of the University of Marburg a striking mural painting depicting Wolff's triumphal arrival in that town.

swelled in the course of the eighteenth century by numerous and powerful voices: by Dr. Johnson (in his youth, though not in his later years),<sup>23</sup> the Marquis d'Argens,<sup>24</sup> Quesnay<sup>25</sup> (who believed the Founding Fathers of the Chinese polity and economy were Physiocrats *sans le savoir*), Goldsmith, whose *Citizen of the World* is an imitation of a series of French *Lettres Chinoises* by various writers;<sup>26</sup> and above all by Voltaire. Among their higher classes, at least, he declared, deism, the pure religion of nature, which Europe, and most civilized peoples, had lost, had been preserved uncorrupted.

Worship God and practise justice—this is the sole religion of the Chinese *literati*. . . . O Thomas Aquinas, Scotus, Bonaventure, Francis, Dominic, Luther, Calvin, canons of Westminster, have you anything better? For four thousand years this religion, so simple and so noble, has endured in absolute integrity; and it is probable that it is much more ancient.

True, "the common people are foolish and superstitious in China, as elsewhere." But the "wise and tolerant government, concerned only with morals and public order," has never interfered with these beliefs of the populace: "il ne trouva pas mauvais que la canaille crût des inepties, pourvu qu'elle ne troublât point l'État et qu'elle obéît aux lois." Thanks to this rational and tolerant régime, "Chinese history has never been disturbed by any religious disorders," and "no mystery has ravaged their souls."<sup>27</sup> In the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, while admitting their backwardness in the natural sciences and the mechanic arts, Voltaire insisted upon their superiority in more important things:

One may be a very poor physicist and an excellent moralist. Thus it is

<sup>23</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, VIII (1738), 365. This and other passages of Johnson on China have been brought together by a Chinese writer, Mr. Fan Tsen-chung: *Dr. Johnson and Chinese Culture* (*Occasional Papers of the China Society*, N. S., No. 6), London, 1945.

<sup>24</sup> *Lettres chinoises* (1739); *Histoire de l'esprit humain* (1767), 30.

<sup>25</sup> Quesnay's *Du despotisme de la Chine* has been translated, with an introduction, by Maverick, *China a model for Europe*, 1946. Cf. also Reichwein, *op. cit.*, 101 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. R. S. Crane and H. J. Smith: "A French Influence on Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*," *Modern Philology* (1921), 183.

<sup>27</sup> *Dieu et les hommes*, 1769.



in morals, in political economy, in agriculture, that the Chinese have perfected themselves. We have taught them all the rest; but in these matters we ought to be their disciples. . . . The constitution of their empire is in truth the best that there is in the world . . . [In spite of the superstitions of the lower classes] the fact remains that four thousand years ago, when we did not know how to read, they knew everything essentially useful of which we boast today.<sup>28</sup>

When, then, a new criterion of excellence in the arts was also introduced as an importation from China, and supported by a constant appeal to Chinese examples, its acceptance was obviously facilitated by the widely current assumption—of which I have given a few illustrations—of the excellence, or the actual superiority, in the chief essentials of civilization, of the Chinese ways of doing things.

## 3

In England apparently the earliest, and certainly the most zealous, enthusiast for the Chinese was Sir William Temple. In his essay *Upon Heroick Virtue* (1683) he devoted a long chapter to them, and described their government as "framed and policed with the utmost force and reach of human wisdom, reason and contrivance; and in practice to excel the very speculations of other men, and all those imaginary schemes of the *European* wits, the Institutions of *Xenophon*, the Republic of *Plato*, the Utopias and Oceanas of our modern writers." He was also a passionate garden-lover, and liked to philosophize about beauty in general in connection with the problem of garden-design. His ideas on the subject are expressed in his essay *Upon the Gardens of Epicurus*, written about 1685, published in 1692, in the second volume of his *Essays*. He observes that

in the laying out of gardens, great sums may be thrown away without effect or honour if there want sense in proportion to money; or if nature be not followed; which I take to be the great rule in this, and perhaps in everything else, as far as the conduct not only of our lives, but our governments. And whether the greatest of mortal men should attempt the forcing of nature, may best be judged by observing how

<sup>28</sup> Art.: "De la Chine."

seldom God Almighty does it himself, by so few true, and undisputed miracles as we see or hear of in the world.

Temple is nevertheless so far subject to the older convention that his recommendations to the English designer as to "the best forms of gardens" relate only to "such as are in some sort regular." But he adds a paragraph which, in describing and extolling the gardens of the Chinese, foreshadows the new English style of the following century:

There may be other forms wholly irregular that may, for aught I know, have more beauty than any of the others; but they must owe it to some extraordinary dispositions of nature in the seat, or some great race of fancy or judgment in the contrivance, which may reduce many disagreeing parts into some figure, which shall yet, upon the whole, be very agreeable. Something of this I have seen in some places, but heard more of it from others who had lived much among the Chinese; a people whose way of thinking seems to be as wide of ours in Europe as their country does. Among us, the beauty of building and planting is placed chiefly in some certain proportions, symmetries, or uniformities; our walks and our trees ranged so as to answer one another, and at exact distances. The Chinese scorn this way of planting, and say, a boy that can tell a hundred, may plant walks of trees in straight lines, and over-against one another, and to what length and extent he pleases. But their greatest reach of imagination is employed in contriving figures, where the beauty shall be great, and strike the eye, but without any order or disposition of parts that shall be commonly or easily observed: and though we have hardly any notion of this sort of beauty, yet they have a particular word to express it, and, where they find it hit their eye at first sight, they say the sharawadgi is fine or admirable, or any such expression of esteem. And whoever observes the work upon the best India gowns, or the painting upon their best screens or porcelains, will find their beauty is all of this kind (that is) without order.<sup>29</sup>

Temple, however, little realizing that he was laying down the principles of the future *jardin anglais*, thought the attainment of this subtler beauty of the irregular too difficult for his countrymen to aspire to:

<sup>29</sup> *Works* (1757), III, 229-230. The NED declares that "Chinese scholars agree that the word *sharawadgi* cannot belong to that language." Mr. Y. Z. Chang, who has considered the problem at my request, finds the probable original of the word in the syllables *sa-ro-(k) wai-chi*, which may have the meaning "the quality of being impressive or surprising through careless or unorderly grace." (Cf. his article in *Modern Language Notes* (1930), 221-224).

I should hardly advise any of these attempts in the figure of gardens among us; they are adventures of too hard achievement for any common hands; and though there may be more honour if they succeed well, yet there is more dishonour if they fail, and 'tis twenty to one they will; whereas, in regular figures 'tis hard to make any great and remarkable faults.<sup>30</sup>

This, however, must obviously have affected an ambitious designer of a later generation less as a discouragement than as a challenge. "Fortunately"—as Walpole long afterwards remarked in quoting the passage—"Kent and a few others were not so timid."

As bearing upon the degree of importance to be attached to these observations of Temple's it is to be borne in mind that he was universally read by persons of taste in the eighteenth century; he was regarded as one of the great masters of English prose and his essays "were used as exercises and models."<sup>31</sup>

Mason in *The English Garden*, Bk. II (1777), recognized Temple's priority in the apostolic succession of English garden-theorists; but (in consequence of a political-literary feud which had by that time broken out, to which I shall later refer), he suppressed the fact that the one doctrine of Temple which he applauded was derived from the Chinese. After satirizing the artificiality and formality of the garden at Moor Park which Temple had pronounced "perfect," Mason adds:

And yet full oft  
O'er TEMPLE's studious hour did Truth preside,  
Sprinkling her lustre o'er his classic page:  
There hear his candour own in fashion's spite,  
In spite of courtly dullness, hear it own  
"There is a grace in wild variety  
Surpassing rule and order."

TEMPLE, yes,  
There is a grace; and let eternal wreaths  
Adorn their brows who fixt its empire here.  
The Muse shall hail the champions that herself  
Led to the fair achievement.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *DNB*, XIX, 531.

<sup>32</sup> *The English Garden*, II, 483-494.

Now Temple's enunciation—definite, though made with the timidity of one who feels himself to be advancing a radical novelty—of the ideal of beauty without order (or manifest order) antedates by more than two decades Addison's praise of artificial wildness in gardens in the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. Miss Manwaring gives Addison the credit of being "the most influential early advocate of . . . escape from the artificial in gardening."<sup>33</sup> But in his most noteworthy expression on the subject (*Spectator*, No. 414, June 25, 1712), Addison expressly sets up the Chinese as the actual exemplars of the ideals which he is preaching; and most of the passage is taken from Temple without acknowledgment:

Writers who have given us an account of *China*, tell us that the inhabitants of that country laugh at the Plantations of our *Europeans*, which are laid out by rule and line; because they say any one may place Trees in equal Rows and uniform Figures. They choose rather to show a Genius in Works of Nature, and thereby always conceal the Art by which they direct themselves. They have a Word it seems in their Language, by which they express the particular Beauty of a Plantation that thus strikes the Imagination at first Sight, without discovering what it is that has so agreeable an Effect. Our *British* gardeners, on the contrary, instead of humouring Nature, love to deviate from it as much as possible. Our Trees rise in Cones, Globes, and Pyramids. We see the Marks of the Scissors upon every Plant and Bush.

Next to Addison chronologically in the revolt against symmetry in garden-design, Pope is usually placed in the histories of the movement; but in his earliest manifesto against the modern practice of gardening (in *The Guardian*, No. 17, 1713) Pope quotes with approval from Temple's essay; and much of the famous passage about gardens in the *Epistle to the Earl of Burlington*, 1731, reads like a metrical paraphrase of some of Temple's remarks—though without mention of the Chinese.

We must, then, I think, see in Temple's account of the peculiarities and underlying principles of Chinese gardening the probable effective beginning (in England) of the new ideas about that art which were destined to have consequences of such unforeseen range. It will, further, be observed that the

<sup>33</sup> *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England*, 124.



passage introduces a Chinese word to express approximately the notion of the "picturesque"—an aesthetic category distinct from both the sublime and the beautiful, in the neo-classical sense—for which no English term except the vague, and still to many ears disparaging, "romantic" was yet available. "Picturesque" apparently did not come into use until the first decade of the eighteenth century (the first reference to it in *NED* is of 1703); and Pope employs it in 1712 somewhat apologetically, as a Gallicism. The concept of "the picturesque" as such a distinct property—not limited to the visual arts—had its formal definition and elaboration from Uvedale Price just a century after Temple (*Essay on the Picturesque* 1794). To follow Mr. Hussey's abridgment:

While the outstanding qualities of the sublime were vastness and obscurity, and those of the beautiful smoothness and gentleness, the characteristics of the picturesque were 'roughness and sudden variation joined to irregularity' of form, color, lighting, and even sound.<sup>34</sup>

Now, as Mr. Hussey justly remarks, "the picturesque phase through which each art passed, roughly between 1730 and 1830 was in each case a prelude to Romanticism"—or at least, as it should qualify, to one of the Romanticisms. What I am suggesting is that this prelude definitely began nearly half a century before 1730, and that the first clearly audible notes of it appear in Temple's account of the nature of the beauty sought and attained by the Chinese designers of pleasure-gardens. The recognized significance of this passage of Temple's may be further gathered from an essay of Richard Owen Cambridge in *The World*, 1755. After depreciating the gardens of "Le Nantre" (i. e., Le Nôtre) Cambridge writes:

This forced taste, aggravated by some Dutch acquisitions, for more than half a century deformed the face of Nature in this country, though several of our best writers had conceived nobler ideas, and prepared the way for improvements which have since followed. Sir William Temple, in his gardens of Epicurus, expatiates with great pleasure on that at More Park in Hertfordshire; yet after he has extolled it as the pattern of a perfect garden for use, beauty, and magnificence, he rises to nobler images, and in a kind of prophetic spirit points out a higher

<sup>34</sup> *The Picturesque*, p. 14.

style, free and unconfined. . . . It is the peculiar happiness of this age to see these just and noble ideas brought into practice, regularity banished, prospects opened, the country called in, Nature rescued and improved, and art decently concealing herself under her own perfections.<sup>35</sup>

But Addison, in *Spectator*, No. 414, undeniably added to the notion of the qualities of Chinese gardens an element which it had not explicitly had in Temple. Natural landscape is usually ungeometrical, irregular, highly diversified, without obvious plan; Chinese gardens had been represented by Temple as ungeometrical, irregular, highly diversified, without obvious plan; but it did not follow—nor, though he demanded that Nature be followed in garden-design, had he expressly said—that Chinese gardens resemble natural landscape or that they are free from all artificialities except an artificial naturalness. Addison, however, supposed that since both had certain abstract qualities in common, they must be essentially similar—and therefore assumed that the Chinese gardeners sought and achieved the imitation of "natural wildness." This assumption long continued to be widely current; and it was partly because of it that the Chinese and English styles were so generally conceived to be essentially identical. But the "naturalness" of the Chinese garden, either in fact or intent, was subsequently denied—sometimes by its critics but also by the most zealous of its later champions. The supposition that the Chinese gardeners aimed at the reproduction of natural effects did not, at all events, rest wholly upon the authority of Addison—who probably knew nothing whatever of the matter. Some actual observers testified to the same effect. Father Le Comte in 1696 wrote that "the Chinese, who so little apply themselves to order their Gardens, and to manage the real Ornaments, are nevertheless taken with them, and are at some cost about them; they make Grotto's in them, raise pretty little

<sup>35</sup> *The World*, No. 18. Cambridge adds in the essay: "Whatever may have been reported, whether truly or falsely, of the Chinese gardens, it is certain that we are the first of the Europeans who have founded this taste. . . . Our gardens are already the astonishment of foreigners, and in proportion as they accustom themselves to consider and understand them, will become their admiration."

Artificial Eminences, transport thither by piecemeal whole Rocks, which they heap upon one another, without any further design then to imitate Nature." <sup>36</sup> A later example, in which the notion of *sharawadgi* is already equated with the imitation of nature, is to be found in one of the *Lettres édifiantes* written in 1767 by le Père Benoist:

The Chinese, in the ornamentation of their gardens, employ art to perfect nature so successfully that an artist is deserving of praise only if his art is not apparent and in proportion as he has the better imitated nature. Here there are not, as in Europe, alleys drawn out till they are lost to sight, or terraces disclosing an infinity of distant objects which by their multitude prevent the imagination from fixing upon any one in particular. In the gardens of China the eye is not fatigued; views are almost always confined within a space proportioned to its reach. You behold a whole of which the beauty strikes and enchants; and a few hundred paces farther on new objects present themselves to you and cause in you new admiration.<sup>37</sup>

The gardens are traversed by numerous canals winding amongst artificial mountains, sometimes falling in cascades, sometimes spreading out into the valleys in lakes. The irregular banks of the canals and lakes are provided with parapets, but, contrary to the European custom in such cases, the parapets are formed of seemingly natural rocks. "Si l'ouvrier emploie beaucoup de temps à les travailler, ce n'est que pour en augmenter les inégalités et leur donner une forme encore plus champêtre." Amongst the rocks are introduced caves which "seem natural and are overgrown with trees and shrubbery."<sup>38</sup>

Of the prevalence in the second half of the century of the belief in the identity of the Chinese and English styles in gardening, and in the derivation of the latter from the former, I give a few examples; others may be found in Mr. Hussey's book. Goldsmith lent it support in *The Citizen of the World* (1760); he makes his Chinese philosopher in London say (Letter XXXI):

<sup>36</sup> English tr. (1697) of Le Comte's *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine* (1696), 162.

<sup>37</sup> *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, ed. of Aimé-Martin, IV (1877), 120.

<sup>38</sup> For an illustration of some of these effects of artificial naturalness, see Mrs. Kerby's *An Old Chinese Garden*: "The 'Let-Go' Bower."

The English have not yet brought the art of gardening to the same perfection with the Chinese, but have lately begun to imitate them. Nature is now followed with greater assiduity than formerly; the trees are suffered to shoot out with the utmost luxuriance; the streams, no longer forced from their native beds, are permitted to wind along the valleys; spontaneous flowers take the place of the finished parterre, and the enamelled meadow of the shaven green.

A French writer in the *Gazette littéraire* observes that the English were not really the originators of the new style:

Though Kent had the glory of being the first to introduce into his own country the most natural method of laying out gardens, he cannot be said to have been the inventor of it; for aside from the fact that this method has always been practised in Asia, among the Chinese, the Japanese, . . . it was anticipated in France by the celebrated Dufresnoy.<sup>39</sup>

The Abbé Delille in a footnote to *Les Jardins* (1782) repeats this, with the exception of the claim of priority for the French. While Kent was the first European "who attempted with success the free style which has begun to spread throughout all Europe, the Chinese were without doubt the first inventors of it." In the text of the poem Delille had, indeed (following Walpole) suggested another source of this horticultural primitivism, the description of Eden in *Paradise Lost*.

Aimez donc des jardins la beauté naturelle.  
Dieu lui-même aux mortels en traça le modèle.  
Regardez dans Milton. Quand ses puissantes mains  
Préparent un asyle au premier des humains,  
Le voyez-vous tracer des routes régulières,  
Contraindre dans leurs cours les ondes prisonnières?  
Le voyez-vous parer d'étranges ornemens  
L'enfance de la terre et son premier printemps?  
Sans contrainte, sans art, de ses douces prémices  
La Nature épuisa les plus pures délices.

In the prose note, however, Delille explains that while, since *plusieurs Anglois prétendent que c'est cette belle description du paradis terrestre, et quelques morceaux de Spencer, qui ont*

<sup>39</sup> *Gazette littéraire* (1771), VI, 369. The term "le jardin anglo-chinois" still distinguished one of the main divisions of the history of gardening in A. Lefèvre's *Les parcs et les jardins*, 2d ed., 1871.

*donné l'idée des jardins irréguliers*, he has, in the poem, "preferred the authority of Milton as more poetic," it is not that he really questions "that this *genre* comes from the Chinese." Gray had, some time before, in a letter to a friend, complained with some bitterness of this current assumption, which seemed to him to rob the English of their chief distinction in the arts:

Count Algarotti is very civil to our nation, but there is one point on which he does not do us justice; I am the more solicitous about it, because it relates to the only taste we can call our own; the only proof of our original talent in the matter of pleasure, I mean our skill in gardening, or rather laying out grounds: and this is no small honour to us, since neither France nor Italy have ever had the least notion of it, nor yet do at all comprehend it when they see it. That the Chinese have this beautiful art in high perfection seems very probable from the Jesuits' letters, and from Chambers's little discourse published some years ago; but it is very certain we copied nothing from them, nor had anything but Nature for our model. It is not forty years since the art was born among us, and as sure we then had no information on this head from China at all.<sup>40</sup>

But Gray was mistaken. He had, oddly, forgotten Sir William Temple and *sharawadgi*. There is, it is true, no reason, so far as I can recall, for supposing that the earliest practitioners of the new English style directly imitated Chinese models in detail. But they had probably all read Temple; they had certainly read Addison and Pope on gardens; in these writers they found set forth certain general aesthetic principles pertinent to garden-design, which they proceeded to carry out, according to their several lights; and these principles Temple, by whom Addison and Pope were unmistakably influenced, professed to have learned from the Chinese.

Chinese architecture, after a time, began to take its place with Chinese gardens as a vindication of the new aesthetic creed. That it, too, could, to an aesthetically sensitive European, seem to reveal an essentially different and really superior kind of beauty—of which the secret was irregularity, concealment of formal design, and surprise—may be seen from a letter of a French Jesuit missionary who was also a painter, le

<sup>40</sup> *Memoirs of Mr. Gray*, Sec. V, Letter VIII; cited in notes to Mason's *Works*, I, 404.

frère Attiret. This letter, written in 1743 and published in vol. XXVII (1749) of the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, was, for the later part of the century, one of the important media through which Chinese taste was interpreted. I therefore quote the most pertinent part of it.

My eyes and my taste, since I have been in China, have become a little Chinese. . . . It is because of the great variety which they give to their buildings that I admire the fertility of their minds. I am, indeed, somewhat inclined to think that we are impoverished and sterile, in comparison with them.

In their greater structures, public buildings, *etc.*, the Chinese, Attiret observes, demand "symétrie et bel ordre," but in their pleasure-houses there reigns almost everywhere *un beau désordre, une antisymétrie*.

One would say that each palace is made after the ideas or the model of some foreign country, that everything is arranged separately and at random, that one part is not made for another. From the description of this one might suppose that it produces a disagreeable impression; but when one sees it, one thinks otherwise, and admires the art with which this irregularity is conducted. All is in good taste, and so well disposed that one does not see the whole beauty of it at a single view; it provides enjoyment for a long time and satisfies all one's curiosity.<sup>41</sup>

The entire letter, englished by Joseph Spence under the pseudonym of Sir Harry Beaumont, is included in Dodsley's *Fugitive Pieces* (1761), I, 61 ff.: *A Particular Account of the Emperor of China's Gardens, near Peking: in a Letter from F. Attiret, a French Missionary, now employed by that Emperor to paint the Apartments in those Gardens, to his Friend at Paris.*

Of Attiret's letter the echo may still be heard in the last decade of the century; Bernardin de St. Pierre refers to it in a passage of his *Harmonies de la Nature* (written 1793, published 1814), complaining that architecture has usually imitated only what he calls the "fraternal harmonies" of Nature, which consist in symmetry and consonance, and neglected the *harmonies conjugales*, of which the essence is contrast, and which,

<sup>41</sup> The passage has been cited in Mille Belevitch—Stankevitch's dissertation, *Le Goût Chinois en France au temps de Louis XIV*, 1910.

if introduced into this art, would above all "free it from the monotony which is its common fault." He adds:

On peut encore employer diverses beautés en architecture, d'après les autres harmonies de la nature. Les Chinois en savent là-dessus plus que nous, comme on peut s'en convaincre dans la lettre du frère Attiret, peintre, qui nous a donné une description très-intéressante de l'architecture de leurs palais.<sup>42</sup>

Returning to the middle of the century, we find Horace Walpole a zealous, though he was not to prove a faithful, convert. "I am," he writes to his friend Mann in 1750, "almost as fond of the Sharawadgi, or Chinese want of symmetry, in buildings as in grounds and gardens." And he consequently finds classical architecture unsatisfying: in Grecian buildings "the variety is little and admits of no charming irregularities."<sup>43</sup> Walpole's Gothicism of this period was closely related to his taste for *sharawadgi*; for it was apparently something of a commonplace of the time that "the Beauty of Gothick Architecture consists, like that of a Pindarick Ode, in the Boldness and Irregularity of its Members."<sup>44</sup>

Note how a defender of the classic tradition in 1755 couples the Chinese with the Gothic fashion and attacks them both in the name of simplicity and regularity:

<sup>42</sup> *Œuvres posthumes*, ed. Aimé-Martin, 1833, p. 330. In the preface to his *Arcadie* Bernardin says that he has composed his book *suivant les lois de la nature et à la manière des chinois*.

<sup>43</sup> *Letters*, ed. Toynbee, III, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Letter of John Ivory Talbot in *An Eighteenth Century Correspondence* edited by Lilian Dickins and Mary Stanton (1910), p. 303. The identity of the notions of Gothic and Chinese has been briefly noted by Mr. Hussey: "As Shaftesbury had seen no difference between the 'deformity' of Gothick and Chinese taste, so did the minds of the mid-century confound them." For the connection of the idea of the irregularity of the Pindaric ode with that of the Chinese style, cf. Robert Lloyd's *The Poet* (1762):

And when the frisky wanton writes  
In Pindar's (what d'ye call 'em)—flights,  
Th' uneven measure, short and tall,  
Now rhyming twice, now not at all,  
In curves and angles twirls about,  
Like Chinese railing, in and out.

On the aesthetic ideas connected with eighteenth-century Gothicism, chiefly in England, and their relation to the *goût chinois*, cf. also "The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature," below.

The applause which is so fondly given to Chinese decorations or to the barbarous productions of a Gothic genius, . . . seems once more to threaten the ruin of that simplicity which distinguishes the Greek and Roman arts as eternally superior to those of every other nation. . . . The present vogue of Chinese and Gothic architecture has, besides its novelty, another cause of its good reception; which is, that there is no difficulty in being merely whimsical. A spirit capable of entering into all the beauties of antique simplicity is the portion of minds used to reflection, and the result of a corrected judgment; but here all men are equal. A manner confined to no rules cannot fail of having the crowd of imitators in its party, where novelty is the sole criterion of elegance. It is no objection that the very end of all building is forgot; that all reference to use and climate, all relation of one proportion to another, of the thing supporting to the thing supported, of the accessory to the principal, is often entirely subverted. . . . As this Chinese and Gothic spirit has begun to deform some of the finest streets in the capital, whenever an academy shall be founded for the promoting the arts of sculpture, painting, and architecture, some scheme should be thought of at the same time to discourage the encroachment of this pretended elegance; and an Anti-Chinese society will be a much more important institution in the world of arts, than an Anti-Gallican in that of politics.<sup>45</sup>

A satire against Chinese architecture and gardening inspired by somewhat different aesthetic predilections is to be seen in James Cawthorne's poem *Of Taste*, 1756. The poet evidently was no classicist; he laments that

Half our churches, such the mode that reigns,  
Are Roman theatres or Grecian fanes;  
Where broad-arched windows to the eye convey  
The keen diffusion of too strong a day.

But he recognized in the Chinese mode an exaggerated revulsion against both classical models and the principles which they were supposed to embody:

Of late, 'tis true, quite sick of Rome and Greece,  
We fetch our models from the wise Chinese;  
European artists are too cool and chaste,  
For Mand'rin is the only man of taste;  
Whose bolder genius, fondly wild to see

<sup>45</sup> *The World*, March 27, 1755.

His grove a forest, and his pond a sea,  
Breaks out—and whimsically great, designs  
Without the shackles or of rules or lines.<sup>46</sup>

A Chinese designer, as conceived by this poet of the mid-eighteenth century, was manifestly a very romantic fellow—in more than one sense of the term. The poem goes on to depict the effects of his influence in England:

Form'd on his plans our farms and seats begin  
To match the boasted villas of Pekin.  
On every hill a spire-crowned temple swells,  
Hung round with serpents and a fringe of bells.  
In Tartar huts our cows and horses lie,  
Our hogs are fattened in an Indian sty;  
On every shelf a Joss divinely stares,  
Nymphs laid on chintzes sprawl upon our chairs;  
While o'er our cabinets Confucius nods,  
Midst porcelain elephants and china gods.

## 4

The chief enthusiast and propagandist for Chinese gardens in the second half of the eighteenth century is commonly said to have been Sir William Chambers; and though this is true, it is also true that he almost completely reversed the usual account of the aesthetic principles underlying Chinese gardening, and in doing so dealt its vogue in England a very heavy blow. Chambers had visited China in his youth, and in 1757 had published a volume of *Designs of Chinese buildings, furniture, dresses, machines and utensils, engraved by the best hands from the originals drawn in China by Mr. Chambers. . . . To which is annexed a description of their temples, houses, gardens, etc.* (London, 1757).<sup>47</sup> This magnificent folio can hardly have been widely accessible; but the section on gardening was re-

<sup>46</sup> *Of Taste, an Essay*, 1756. In Chalmers (1810), XV, 246. For a satire on the "improvement" in architecture "not merely by the adoption of what we call Chinese, nor by the restoration of what we call Gothic, but by a happy mixture of both," see *The World*, Feb. 20, 1754. Cf. also the prose *Essay on Taste* of the Aberdeen philosopher Alexander Gerard (1756, published 1759) in which the tendencies "to imitate the Chinese or revive the Gothic taste" are coupled as twin examples of a craving for novelty rather than "real beauty."

<sup>47</sup> There is a French version of the *Design*, Lond., Haberkorn, 1757.

printed in Percy's *Miscellaneous Pieces relating to the Chinese*.<sup>48</sup> Chambers's admiration for Chinese architecture was at this time moderate, to say the least:

Let it not be suggested that my intention is to promote a taste so much inferior to the antique, and so very unfit for our climate: but a particular so interesting as the architecture of one of the most extraordinary nations in the universe cannot be a matter of indifference to any true lover of the arts, and an architect should by no means be ignorant of so singular a stile of building. . . . Though, generally speaking, Chinese architecture does not suit European purposes; yet in extensive parks and gardens, where a great variety of scenes are required, or in immense palaces, containing a numerous series of apartments, I do not see the impropriety of finishing some of the inferior ones in the Chinese taste. Variety is always delightful; and novelty, attended with nothing inconsistent or disagreeable, sometimes takes the place of beauty. . . . The buildings of the Chinese are neither remarkable for magnitude or richness of materials; yet there is a singularity in their manner, a justness in their proportion, a simplicity, and sometimes even beauty, in their form, which recommend them to our notice. I look upon them as toys in architecture; and as toys are sometimes, on account of their oddity, prettyness, or neatness of workmanship, admitted into the cabinets of the curious, so may Chinese buildings be sometimes allowed a place among compositions of a nobler kind.<sup>49</sup>

But of the Chinese gardens he speaks much more highly, though still in the usual vein:

The Chinese excell in the art of laying out gardens. Their taste in that is good, and what we have for some time past been aiming at in England, though not always with success. . . . Nature is their pattern and their aim is to imitate her in all her beautiful irregularities. . . . As the Chinese are not fond of walking, we seldom meet with avenues or spacious walks, as in our European plantations: the whole ground is laid out in a variety of scenes and you are led, by winding passages cut in the groves, to the different points of view, each of which is marked by a seat, a building, or some other object. The perfection of their gardens consists in the number, beauty, and diversity of these scenes. The Chinese gardeners, like the European painters, collect from nature the most pleasing objects, which they

<sup>48</sup> Dodsley, Lond., 1762, vol. II.

<sup>49</sup> *Designs*, etc. 1757, preface.

endeavour to combine in such a manner, as not only to appear to the best advantage separately, but likewise to unite in forming an elegant and striking whole.<sup>50</sup>

Even in this early work of Chambers, it is true, features of the Chinese gardens were mentioned which could hardly be described as close imitations of nature. But this aspect of the Chinese taste—or of his account of it—comes out more clearly in his *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, 1772, which brought on a crisis in the history of the *goût chinois* and led to one of the most characteristic and celebrated of eighteenth-century literary rows.<sup>51</sup> The superiority of the Chinese to the English gardens was now proclaimed by Chambers in extravagant terms naturally annoying to British *amour propre*, and especially to the friends and admirers of Capability Brown, the reigning English practitioner, and Chambers's rival:

Amongst the Chinese, Gardening is held in much higher esteem, than it is in Europe; they rank a perfect work in that Art, with the greatest productions of the human understanding; and say, that its efficacy in moving the passions, yields to that of few other arts whatever. Their Gardeners are not only Botanists, but also Painters and Philosophers; having a thorough knowledge of the human mind, and of the arts by which its strongest feelings are excited.<sup>52</sup>

Not of such sort are the English "improvers."

In this island [the art] is abandoned to kitchen gardeners, well skilled in the cultivation of sallads, but little acquainted with the principles of ornamental gardening. It cannot be expected that men, uneducated and doomed by their condition to waste the vigour of life in hard labour, should ever go far in so refined, so difficult a pursuit.<sup>53</sup>

The gardens of Europe Chambers condemned almost without exception. His ridicule of the "antient style" still prevailing

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> There is also a French edition, *Dissertation sur le jardinage de l'Orient*, Lond., G. Griffin, 1772-3. A German translation by Ewald appeared in 1775. To the second English (1773) and the first French edition is annexed an *Explanatory Discourse* by "Tan Chet-qua of Quang-chew-fu, Gent.," a recent Chinese visitor to London. The *Discourse*, which is, of course, by Chambers, was his reply to Mason's *Heroic Epistle*.

<sup>52</sup> *Dissertation*, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> *Dissertation*, preface.

on the Continent, where "not a twig is suffered to grow as Nature directs, nor is a form admitted but what is scientific, and determinable by rule and compass," merely repeated the current fashions. What was, to his contemporaries, sensational about the book was that it treated with even greater contempt "the new manner . . . universally adopted in England," in which "no appearance of art is tolerated."

Our gardens differ very little from common fields, so closely is vulgar nature copied in most of them: there is generally so little variety, and so much want of judgment in the choice of the objects, such a poverty of imagination in the contrivance, and of art in the arrangement, that these compositions rather appear the offspring of chance than design; and a stranger is often at a loss to know whether he be walking in a common meadow, or in a pleasure ground, made and kept at a very considerable expence: he finds nothing to delight or amuse him; nothing to keep up his attention, or excite his curiosity, little to gratify the senses, and less to touch the passions, or gratify the understanding.<sup>54</sup>

In short, "neither the artful nor the simple style of gardening is right, the one being too much refined and too extravagant a deviation from nature; the other, like a Dutch picture, an affected adherence to her, without choice or judgment. One manner is absurd; the other is insipid and vulgar: a judicious mixture of art and nature, an extract of what is good in both manners, would certainly be more perfect than either." It is, then, as the exemplar of this that the Chinese garden is at first commended by Chambers to the study of his countrymen.

Yet it presently appears that in a "judicious mixture" nature and art are not present in equal parts, but that the second is the more abundant ingredient:

Though the Chinese artists have nature for their general model, yet are they not so attached to her as to exclude all appearance of art: on the contrary, they think it, on many occasions, necessary to make an ostentatious shew of their labour. Nature, they say, affords us but few materials to work with; plants, ground and water, are her only productions: and though both the forms and arrangements of these may be varied to an incredible degree, yet have they but few striking varieties; the rest being of the nature of changes rung upon a bell,

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.



which, though in reality different, still produce the same uniform kind of jingling; the variation being too minute to be easily perceived.

Art must therefore supply the scantiness of nature; and not only be employed to produce variety, but also novelty and effect: for the simple arrangements of nature are met with in every common field, to a certain degree of perfection; and are therefore too familiar to excite any strong sensation in the mind of the beholder, or to produce any uncommon degree of pleasure.

After describing the Chinese fashion of scattering about their grounds "statues, busts, bas-reliefs, and every production of the chisel," and also "antient inscriptions, verses, and moral sentences," Chambers represents the Chinese artists as justifying their methods expressly on the ground that all improvements are deviations from the natural.

Our vestments, say they, are neither of leather, nor like our skins, but formed of rich silks and embroideries; our houses and palaces bear no resemblance to caverns in the rocks, which are the only natural habitations; nor is our music either like thunder, or the whistling of the northern wind, the harmony of nature. Nature produces nothing either boiled, roasted or stewed; and yet we do not eat raw meat: nor doth she supply us with any other tools for all our purposes, but teeth and hands; yet we have saws, hammers, axes, and a thousand other implements: in short, there is scarcely anything in which art is not apparent; and why should its appearance be excluded from gardening only? Poets and painters soar above the pitch of nature, when they would give energy to their compositions. The same privilege, therefore, should be allowed to gardeners: inanimate, simple nature is too insipid for our purposes: much is expected from us; and therefore, we have occasion for every aid that either art or nature can furnish. The scenery of a garden should differ as much from common nature, as an heroic poem<sup>55</sup> doth from a prose relation: and gardeners, like poets, should give a loose rein to their imagination; and even fly beyond the bounds of truth, whenever it is necessary to elevate, to embellish, to enliven, or to add novelty to their subject.<sup>56</sup>

This anti-naturalism is still more marked in the Explanatory Discourse. "Till my arrival in England," says Chambers's Chinese gentleman,

<sup>55</sup> This is, of course, the explanation of the title of Mason's satire.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21. Cf. Reichwein, *op. cit.*, 116.

I never doubted but the appearance of art was admissible, even necessary, to the essence of a splendid Garden: and I am more firmly of that opinion, after having seen your English Gardens; though the contrary is so violently maintained by your countrymen, in opposition to the rest of the world, to the practice of all other polished nations, all enlightened ages; and, as far as I am able to judge, in opposition to reason. . . . We admire Nature as much as you do; but being of a more phlegmatick disposition, our affections are somewhat better regulated: we consider how she may be employed, upon every occasion, to the most advantage; and do not always introduce her in the same garb; but show her in a variety of forms; sometimes naked, as you attempt to do; sometimes disguised; sometimes decorated, or assisted by art; scrupulously avoiding, in our most common dispositions, all resemblance to the common face of the country, with which the Garden is immediately surrounded; being convinced, that a removal from one field to another, of the same appearance, can never afford any particular pleasure, nor ever excite powerful sensations of any kind.<sup>57</sup>

Nor does Chambers limit his attack upon the program of imitating mere nature to the special case of gardens. The whole doctrine of imitation, and with it the theory that the source of aesthetic pleasure lies in the recognition of the resemblance of a work of art to its original, is repudiated. Nature is often deplorably *wanting* in wildness and in variety, and is consequently incapable of arousing strong feeling; in these cases her aesthetic deficiencies must be made good by art. Chambers's Chinese visitor observes:

Both your [English] artists and connoisseurs seem to lay too much stress on nature and simplicity; they are the constant cry of every half-witted dabbler, the burthen of every song, the tune by which you are insensibly lulled into dullness and insipidity. If resemblance to nature were the measure of perfection, the waxen figures in Fleet-street would be superior to all the works of the divine Buonarotti; the trouts and woodcocks of Elmer, preferable to the cartoons of Raphael: but, believe me, too much nature is often as bad as too little, as may be deduced from many examples, obvious to every man conversant in polite knowledge. Whatever is familiar is by no means calculated to excite the strongest feelings; and though a close resemblance to familiar objects may delight the ignorant, yet, to the skilful, it has but few charms, never any of the most elevated sort; and is sometimes

<sup>57</sup> Second ed., 144.

even disgusting: without a little assistance from art, nature is seldor tolerable; she may be compared to certain viands, either tasteless or unpleasant in themselves: which, nevertheless, with some seasoning become palatable; or, when properly prepared, compose a most delicious dish.<sup>58</sup>

One of the deficiencies of nature in the matter of landscape design—at least in England—was that her scenes were often not sufficiently “horrid” and “romantic”; where this was the case, the “assistance of art” would consist, for example, in transforming ordinary hills into “stupendous rocks, by partial incrustations of stone, judiciously mixed with turf, fern, wild shrubs, and forest trees.” In short, “there would be no deviation, however trifling, from the usual march of nature, but what would suggest, to a fruitful imagination, some extraordinary arrangement, *something to disguise her vulgarity*.”<sup>59</sup>

Even “simplicity,” sacred word alike of neo-classicism and aesthetic primitivism, receives little reverence from Chambers. It is manifestly even more against the primitivist than the classicist that the following passage is directed:

With respect to simplicity, wherever more is admitted than may be requisite to constitute grandeur, or necessary to facilitate conception, it is always a fault. To the human mind some exertion is always necessary: it must be occupied to be pleased; and is more satisfied with a treat than with a frugal repast: for though it doth not delight in intricacies, yet, without a certain, even a considerable, degree of complication, no grateful sensations can ever be excited. Excessive simplicity can only please the ignorant or weak, whose comprehensions are slow, and whose powers of combination are confined. Simplicity must therefore be used with discretion, and the dose be adapted to the constitution of the patients; amongst savages and Hottentots, where art is unknown, refinements unheard of, an abundant portion may be necessary; but wherever civilization has improved the mental faculties a little, with proper management, will go a very great way: need I prove what the music, poetry, language, arts, and manners of every nation demonstrate, beyond the possibility of a doubt?<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, *Explanatory Discourse*, 132; my italics.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-7. I have corrected an obvious error of punctuation in the original, which has a comma after “patients,” and a semi-colon after “Hottentots.”

It was much more the pleasure of surprise than the pleasure of recognition that Chinese designers, according to Chambers, endeavored to afford the beholder. The effects they sought were to be attained only through variety and novelty; and imitation, even of the best models, was no part of their program. “The artists of that country are so inventive, and so various in their combinations, that no two of their compositions are ever alike: they never copy or imitate each other; they do not even repeat their own productions; saying, that what once has been seen, operates feebly at a second inspection; and that whatever bears even a distant resemblance to a known object, seldom excites a new idea.”<sup>61</sup> Originality, in short, was sought after by Chinese artists. But originality, except in the expression of the same standardized ideas, was inconsistent with neo-classical aesthetic theory; and it was scarcely less inconsistent with the ideal of imitating “natural” effects.

The Chinese gardeners, it will be seen, were, according to Chambers, practising aesthetic psychologists. They therefore classified their designs according to the psychological effect to be produced, and distinguished them “by the appellations of the pleasing, the terrible, and the surprizing.” Of these, “the first are composed of the gayest and most perfect productions of the vegetable world; intermixed with rivers, lakes, cascades, fountains, and water-works of all sorts: being combined and disposed in all the picturesque forms that art or nature can suggest. Buildings, sculptures, and paintings are added to give splendor and variety to these compositions; and the rarest productions of the animal creation are collected to enliven them: nothing is forgot, that can either exhilarate the mind, gratify the senses, or give a spur to the imagination.” The “pleasing scenes” were not, however, necessarily cheerful; under this appellation were included—one would gather from Chambers—the equivalents, in terms of Chinese gardening, of what in European poetry was called *le genre sombre*. For certain parts of their gardens were especially laid out for the purpose of evoking a mood of agreeable melancholy and a sense of the transitoriness of all natural beauty and human glory. It was

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

thus that a Chinese gardener composed a Gray's *Elegy* in the language of horticulture:

The plantations of their autumnal scenes consist of many sorts of oak, beech, and other deciduous trees that are retentive of the leaf, and afford in their decline a rich variegated colouring; with which they blend some ever-greens, some fruit-trees, and the few shrubs and flowers which blossom late in the year,—placing amongst them decayed trees, pollards, and dead stumps, of picturesque forms, overspread with moss and ivy. The buildings with which these scenes are decorated, are generally such as indicate decay, being intended as mementos to the passenger. Some are hermitages and almshouses, where the faithful old servants of the family spend the remains of life in peace, amidst the tombs of their predecessors, who lie buried around them: others are ruins of castles, palaces, temples, and deserted religious houses; or half-buried triumphal arches and mausoleums, with mutilated inscriptions, that once commemorated the heroes of antient times: or they are sepulchres of their ancestors, catacombs and cemeteries of their favourite domestic animals; or whatever else may serve to indicate the debility, the disappointments, and the dissolution of humanity: which, by co-operating with the dreary aspect of autumnal nature, and the inclement temperature of the air, fill the mind with melancholy, and incline it to serious reflections.<sup>62</sup>

As for their "surprizing" or "supernatural" scenes, these are

of the romantic kind, and abound in the marvellous; being calculated to excite in the mind of the spectator quick successions of opposite and violent sensations. Sometimes the passenger is hurried by steep descending paths to subterraneous vaults, divided into stately apartments, where lamps, which yield a faint and glimmering light, discover the pale images of antient kings and heroes, reclining on beds of state; their heads are crowned with garlands of stars, and in their hands are tables of moral sentences: flutes, and soft harmonious organs impelled by subterraneous waters, interrupt, at stated intervals, the silence of the place, and fill the air with solemn melody.

Sometimes the traveller, after having wandered in the dusk of the forest, finds himself on the edge of precipices, in the glare of day-light, with cataracts falling from the mountains around, and torrents raging in the depths beneath him; or at the foot of impending rocks, in gloomy valleys, overhung with woods; or on the banks of dull moving rivers,

<sup>62</sup> *Dissertation*, second ed., 37-8.

whose shores are covered with sepulchral monuments, under the shade of willow, laurel, and other plants, sacred to Manchew, the Genius of sorrow.

His way now lies through dark passages cut in the rocks, on the sides of which are recesses, filled with Colossal figures of dragons, infernal furies, and other horrid forms, which hold, in their monstrous talons, mysterious cabalistic sentences, inscribed on tables of brass; with preparations that yield a constant flame; serving at once to guide and to astonish the passenger: from time to time he is surprized with repeated shocks of electrical impulse, with showers of artificial rain, or sudden violent gusts of wind, and instantaneous explosions of fire; the earth trembles under him, by the power of confined air; and his ears are successively struck with many different sounds, produced by the same means; some resembling the cries of men in torment; some the roaring of bulls, and howl of ferocious animals, with the yell of hounds, and the voices of hunters; others are like the mixed croaking of ravenous birds; and others imitate thunder, the raging of the sea, the explosion of cannon, the sound of trumpets, and all the noise of war.

His road lies through lofty woods, where serpents and lizards of many beautiful sorts crawl upon the ground, and where innumerable apes, cats and parrots, clamber upon the trees to imitate him as he passes; or through flowery thickets, where he is delighted with the singing of birds, the harmony of flutes, and all kinds of soft instrumental music: sometimes, in this romantic excursion, the passenger finds himself in spacious recesses, surrounded with arbors of jessamine, vine and roses; or in splendid pavilions, richly painted and illumined by the sun: here beautiful Tartarean damsels, in loose transparent robes, that flutter in the scented air, present him with rich wines or invigorating infusions of Ginseng and amber, in goblets of agate; mangostans, ananas, and fruits of Quangsi, in baskets of golden filagree; they crown him with garlands of flowers, and invite him to taste the sweets of retirement, on Persian carpets, and beds of camusathskin down.<sup>63</sup>

The "scenes of terror" described by Chambers can hardly have been wholly the work of art, or have been found within the confines even of the largest gardens; they seem rather to consist of stretches of desolate country-side, with their effects heightened by various artificial aids to horripilation. For we are told that they

<sup>63</sup> *Dissertation*, second ed., 42-4.

are composed of gloomy woods, deep vallies inaccessible to the sun, impending barren rocks, dark caverns, and impetuous cataracts rushing down from all parts. The trees are ill formed, forced out of their natural directions, and seemingly torn to pieces by the violence of tempests: some are thrown down and intercept the course of the torrents; others look as if blasted and shattered by the power of lightning: the buildings are in ruins; or half consumed by fire, or swept away by the fury of the waters: nothing remains entire but a few miserable huts dispersed in the mountains; which serve at once to indicate the existence and wretchedness of the inhabitants. Bats, owls, vultures, and every bird of prey flutter in the groves; wolves, tigers and jackalls howl in the forests; half-famished animals wander upon the plains; gibbets, crosses, wheels and the whole apparatus of torture, are seen from the roads; and in the most dismal recesses of the woods, where the ways are rugged and overgrown with poisonous weeds, and where every object bears the marks of depopulation, are temples dedicated to the king of vengeance, deep caverns in the rocks, and descents to gloomy subterraneous habitations, overgrown with brushwood and brambles; near which are inscribed, on pillars of stone, pathetic descriptions of tragical events, and many horrid acts of cruelty, perpetrated there by outlaws and robbers of former times: and to add both to the horror and sublimity of these scenes, they sometimes conceal in cavities, on the summits of the highest mountains, founderies, lime-kilns, and glass works; which send forth large volumes of flame, and continued clouds of thick smoke, that give to these mountains the appearance of volcanoes.<sup>64</sup>

Such scenes, the *Explanatory Discourse* points out, already exist in England in abundance; and it is neither practicable nor desirable to "beautify" out of existence the "commons and wilds, dreary, barren, and serving only to give an uncultivated appearance to the country." On the contrary, they may, with only the slightest additions from art, "easily be framed into scenes of terror, converted into noble pictures of the sublimest cast, and, by an artful contrast, serve to enforce the effect of gayer and more luxuriant prospects." For actual "gibbets with witches hanging *in terrorem* upon them"; "forges, collieries, mines, coal tracts, brick or lime kilns, glass-works, and dif-

<sup>64</sup> Second ed., 44-45. It was, above all, this passage that provided easy material for Mason's satire in *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers*. It sounds less like a design for a garden than for a landscape painting somewhat in the manner of Salvator Rosa.

ferent objects of the horrid kind"; half-famished animals, ragged cottagers, and their picturesquely dilapidated huts:—all these were already common features of the English scene, "particularly near the metropolis." All that was needed was that "a few uncouth struggling trees, some ruins, caverns, rocks, torrents, abandoned villages, in part consumed by fire," should be "artfully introduced and blended with gloomy plantations," in order to "compleat the aspect of desolation, and serve to fill the mind, where there was no possibility of gratifying the senses."<sup>65</sup>

That Chambers had in the *Dissertation* somewhat heightened his descriptions, and put into the mouths of Chinese gardeners aesthetic doctrines of his own, is half-admitted in the *Explanatory Discourse*: whether the gardens described have any existence "but in Chet-quah's brain . . . is immaterial; for the end of all that I have said, was rather as an Artist, to set before you a new style of gardening; than as a Traveller to relate what I have really seen."<sup>66</sup>

Chambers too, then, was seeking to introduce a kind of aesthetic "Romanticism" of which both the principles and the examples were attributed to the Chinese gardeners; but it was in the main a different kind from that initiated by Temple's formulation of the notion of *sharawadgi*. The two had, indeed, one or two elements in common: the repudiation of the ideals of "regularity," symmetry, simplicity, immediately obvious unity of design, and a tendency to seek "variety" in an artistic composition. But beyond this there were radical differences. For Chambers, "nature" was no longer a sacred word, and conscious and deliberate art, transcending the limitations and "vulgarity" of nature, was an essential in the practice of gardening or any other art. And the aim of the Chinese garden-designers, as he described it, was not to "imitate" anything; it was to produce horticultural lyric poems, to compose, out of a mixture of trees, shrubs, rocks, water, and artificial objects, separate scenes having quite diverse qualities and subtly devised for the purpose of expressing and evoking varying

<sup>65</sup> *Dissertation*, 130-131.

<sup>66</sup> *Op. cit.*, 159.



moods, "passions" and "powerful sensations." In this he was foreshadowing *another* variety of "Romanticism" which was to become conspicuous in literature and music in the following century.

But, as I have said, the effect in England of Chambers's intervention was, on the whole, highly unfavorable to the Chinese vogue. Few of his contemporaries were ready to give up "nature"—in *some* sense of the word—as the norm for art, and least of all in the art of gardening. If the Chinese gardens were not truly "natural," so much the worse for them. His attack upon the reigning fashion in garden design had also the curious result of converting the question of the merits of the Chinese style into a sort of party issue, on which Tories and Whigs, the court party and its opponents, were likely to take opposite sides. The outcome was the defection of some of the principal earlier enthusiasts for the *goût chinois*<sup>67</sup>—which, if there was any truth in what Chambers had written, could *not* be correctly designated as the *goût anglo-chinois*. Though Chambers was able to carry out to some extent his own conception of a Chinese garden—including the introduction of such highly artificial objects as pagodas into English landscapes—at Kew, his attempt to bring about the adoption of a radically "new" style, based upon fundamentally different aesthetic ideas, seems to have had little success; and when similar ideas later made their appearance in other arts, this was apparently not due to the influence of Chambers's *Dissertation*.

But the conception of a previously unrecognized kind of "beauty" timidly propounded by Temple a century earlier had better fortune and greater effects. The principal object of the present paper has been to show the large and the temporally primary part played by the Chinese influence, and especially by the conception of *sharawadgi* as an aesthetic quality, in the gradual conscious revolt against neo-classical standards which took place during the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century. Though this revolt had its beginning, on a considerable scale, in the arts of gardening and architecture, it speedily

<sup>67</sup> Walpole, for example, by the 1780's had concluded that "fantastic sharawadgis" are as remote from nature as "regular formality" (*Essay on Modern Gardening*, 1785).

extended to literature and all the arts; and its later and purely literary manifestations were at least greatly facilitated and accelerated by the introduction of a new canon of aesthetic excellence and by its repetition and elaboration by a succession of influential writers in the following decades. A turning-point in the history of modern taste was reached when the ideals of regularity, simplicity, uniformity, and easy logical intelligibility, were first openly impugned, when the assumption that true beauty is "geometrical" ceased to be one to which "all consented, as to a Law of Nature." And in England, at all events, the rejection of this assumption seems, throughout most of the eighteenth century, to have been commonly recognized as initially due to the influence and the example of Chinese art.